

NOTES ON NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS.

IX.

BY HARRY C. OBERHOLSER.

FOLLOWING are notes¹ on four species of North American birds belonging to the families *Phaethontidae*, *Ardeidae*, and *Charadriidae*.

***Leptophæthon lepturus catesbyi* (Brandt).**

Mr. G. M. Mathews has already indicated² that the name *Phaethon catesbyi* Brandt should replace that of *Phaethon americanus* Grant. The latter was originally based³ on the bird from the Bermuda Islands, and is, of course, the American representative of *Leptophæthon lepturus*. It differs from *Leptophæthon lepturus* in its somewhat smaller size and less extensive white tips on the five outer primaries, the black areas on these feathers being therefore larger. Mr. Mathews, like Mr. Grant, treats this form as a distinct species, and for this course gives the following rather unconvincing reason⁴: "This bird is only separable by its slightly larger [sic] size and the variation in the black markings of the primaries. In most genera such trifling differences would only be regarded as of subspecific value, but when dealing with Ancient Forms, such as the present, this must be given higher value." Examination of a series of specimens shows, moreover, that the characters separating *Leptophæthon catesbyi* from *Leptophæthon lepturus* are not entirely constant, and that the form must, therefore, be regarded as a subspecies of the latter. With this view of its relationship, its name will become *Leptophæthon lepturus catesbyi*.

¹ For previous papers in this series, cf. 'The Auk,' XXXIV, April, 1917, pp. 191-196; XXXIV, July, 1917, pp. 321-329; XXXIV, October, 1917, pp. 465-470; XXXV, January, 1918, pp. 62-65; XXXV, April, 1918, pp. 185-187; XXXV, October, 1918, pp. 463-467; XXXVI, January, 1919, pp. 81-85; XXXVI, July, 1919, pp. 406-408.

² The Auk, XXXII, No. 2, April, 1915, pp. 195-197.

³ *Phaeton americanus* Grant, Bull. Brit. Ornith. Club, VII, No. XLX, December 26, 1897, p. xxiv.

⁴ Birds of Australia, IV, pt. 3, June 23, 1915, pp. 310-311.

Scæophæthon rubricaudus rothschildi (Mathews).

The Red-tailed Tropic Bird is included in our North American list on the basis of a single specimen obtained by Mr. A. W. Anthony near Guadalupe Island, Lower California, on April 23, 1897.¹ We have recently examined this specimen, which is now No. 21822 in the collection of the Carnegie Museum of Pittsburgh, Pa., and find it to belong to the subspecies *Scæophæthon rubricaudus rothschildi*, recently described² from Laysan Island in the Hawaiian group. This race differs from *Scæophæthon rubricaudus rubricaudus*, from the region about the Island of Mauritius, in its shorter bill and wing; and from *Scæophæthon rubricaudus novæhollandiæ* (Brandt), from Australia, in its smaller size and paler, less rosy coloration. By this change of identification the place of *Scæophæthon rubricaudus rubricaudus* in the North American list should be taken by *Scæophæthon rubricaudus rothschildi*.

Casmerodius albus egretta (Gmelin).

The forms of the genus *Casmerodius* (= *Herodias*³) are commonly considered distinct species. Mr. G. M. Mathews has, however, recently treated⁴ the Australian bird as a subspecies. So far as our material indicates, there are, as Dr. R. B. Sharpe concludes,⁵ three forms of the genus, but all are without doubt only subspecies. The principal characters separating these consist in size, particularly of the tarsus, and in the length of the dorsal plumes or train. The colors of the bill, tarsus, and the bare portion of the tibia, which have been sometimes used as specific distinctions, are more or less unsatisfactory for this purpose, because

¹ The Auk, XV, No. 1, January, 1898, p. 39.

² *Phæthon rubricaudus rothschildi* Mathews, *Birds of Australia*, IV, pt. 3, June 23, 1915, p. 303 (Laysan Island).

³ Attention has already been called by other writers to the fact that the generic name *Herodias* Boie is a synonym of *Egretta* Forster, since its type is really *Ardea garzella* Linnæus, as designated by Gray (*List Genera Birds*, 1841, p. 86). The next available name is *Casmerodius* Gloger, as above given.

⁴ *Birds of Australia*, III, pt. 5, March 26, 1914, pp. 431-435.

⁵ *Cat. Birds Brit. Mus.*, XXVI, 1898, pp. 88-100.

of very great seasonal changes; and until more is known regarding the actual process and sequence of these changes, it is not safe to use the colors of these parts in diagnoses.

The European form of the species, *Casmerodius albus albus* (Linnæus), which ranges also to Africa and central Asia, is a large bird with long tarsi and comparatively short dorsal plumes, the latter usually less than 370 mm. in length, and not reaching much beyond the end of the tail. Examples from India and Burma are somewhat smaller and indicate intergradation with the Australian bird, but are, however, nearer *Casmerodius albus albus*.

The Australian race differs from *Casmerodius albus albus* in smaller size, particularly of the tarsus, and in somewhat shorter dorsal plumes; and Mr. Mathews¹ has separated it as a fourth race under the name *Herodias alba sylvatophora* (Gould). There is, however, apparently no difference between birds from Australia and those from the island of Timor, which is the type locality of *Ardea timoriensis* Lesson, either in the length of the tarsus or the dorsal plumes. Birds from other localities in the Malay Archipelago seem to be the same; while birds from Japan and China, although somewhat verging toward *Casmerodius albus albus*, are so near the Australian form that they are apparently not satisfactorily separable. Thus the birds inhabiting the region from Japan and China to the Malay Peninsula and Australia should again be united under the name *Casmerodius albus timoriensis* (Lesson).

The American bird, which ranges from the United States to Chile and Patagonia, is similar to *Casmerodius albus timoriensis*, but is rather larger and has a much longer train; and it differs from *Casmerodius albus albus* in decidedly smaller size and in its longer dorsal plumes, which latter usually measure from 420 to 500 mm., and reach 100 millimeters or so beyond the end of the tail. Since none of these differences is, however, entirely constant in relation to either *Casmerodius albus albus* or *Casmerodius albus timoriensis*, as a study of specimens shows, the American race should stand as *Casmerodius albus egretta* (Wilson).

¹ *Birds of Australia*, III, pt. 5, March 26, 1914, pp. 431-435.

Charadrius dubius curonicus Gmelin.

The Little Ringed Plover, *Charadrius dubius* Scopoli, is included in the North American list by reason of its supposed accidental occurrence in Alaska and California. The record from California is based on a specimen taken at San Francisco by Mr. E. F. Lorquin, and was made the basis of Mr. Ridgway's *Ægialitis microrhynchus*.¹ This name Mr. Ridgway himself later made² a synonym of *Ægialitis curonicus* (Gmelin). This specimen is still in the United States National Museum collection, where it is numbered 39523; and an examination proves that it is an ultratypical example of *Charadrius dubius curonicus*, as indicated by its very small bill.³

The record which at present forms the basis for the statement that *Charadrius dubius* occurs in Alaska is that of Mr. J. E. Harting,⁴ who, in recording the specimens obtained by Captain Collins of the "Enterprise," mentioned one of this species, but without giving a more definite locality than "doubtless obtained in high northern latitudes." It thus can be readily seen that the assumption of this specimen's Alaskan origin is quite unwarranted. There is, however, a perfectly valid Alaska record, based on a specimen taken on Kodiak Island and recorded as *Charadrius alexandrinus* Pallas.⁵ Without much doubt this record should be put under *Charadrius dubius curonicus*, and, therefore, *Charadrius dubius dubius* should be eliminated from our North American list and replaced by *Charadrius dubius curonicus*.

The present species we have recently referred to the genus *Elscya* Mathews,⁶ but a more careful examination of its characters proves that it does not belong in that group, but is congeneric with *Charadrius hiaticula* Linnæus, the type of *Charadrius*.

¹ American Naturalist, VIII, No. 2, Feb., 1874, p. 109.

² Baird, Brewer, and Ridgway, Water Birds of North America, I, 1884, p. 160.

³ Cf. Hartert and Jackson, Ibis, 1915, pp. 531-533.

⁴ Proc. Zool. Soc. Lond., 1871, p. 117.

⁵ Schalow, Journ. für Ornith., 1891, p. 259.

⁶ Cf. The Auk, XXXV, No. 2, April, 1918, p. 206.